'THE RINGWOOD FIELD NATURALIST' CLUB NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 35 October, 2012

EDITORIAL: The month of October is when True Spring appears on the Middle Yarra Timelines calendar. During the preceding weeks of Early Spring there have been signs of increased activity in the bush, which now erupts in a riot of colour and movement. The multi-coloured profligacy of the floral display reaches its zenith with a living tapestry to delight the eye and spirit. The flower-heads of native grasses catch the slightest breeze, creating an enchanting backdrop to the diversity of terrestrial orchids, one of the exquisite treasures of True Spring. Already field naturalists in the Club have been taking advantage of the lengthening days to explore their favourite places and to discover, as the natural world renews itself, the many delights that our bushland offers. Our weekend away to Yarram in November will provide members with the opportunity to enjoy the study of nature together.

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Members attending the Beaufort Weekend in April 2012 listen to Leader Graeme Fernandes explain the geological history of the area.

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President's Annual Report 2011-12 Peter F Rogers

We still seem to be doing something right. Our Club continues to provide a high standard, drawing new members who find a friendly Club where they feel at home to learn and share a passion for nature.

This is due partly to the hard work of Alison Rogers in compiling interesting yearly programs. Thanks also to the members who suggest topics and/or speakers for the program. Every bit helps and keeps up the high standard. Presentations at the meetings were varied and very interesting. This also included the research undertaken by several Club members in presenting a small talk.

Our regular field trips are still a popular part of our program, again visiting some new areas as well as some old favourites. In addition, members appreciated the chance to visit areas further afield in the company of friends. In spring last year we travelled to The Little Desert and spent the weekend at the Little Desert Lodge. Our autumn weekend was to the Beaufort area and the Mt Cole State Park, an area relatively unknown to most members. Both weekends proved to be quite popular and successful.

Many Club members have commented on the high calibre of presentations by other Club members in displaying their digital images and videos. This is a much looked forward to segment of our meetings. Again, thanks to David Hewitt and Alan Veevers (as fill-in) for their time and efforts, and patience with us all, in loading images and then providing the technical expertise to show them.

As always, the Committee members have made major contributions to the running of the Club, none more so than Lynn Smith who helped with excursions as well as undertaking the duties of Secretary.

I would particularly like to thank Alan Veevers for his hard work and dedication to the Club website. For 10 years Alan has developed, maintained and updated the website. He has decided to pass the baton to Jack Airey, but will be available to assist regarding the website.

Again thanks to Ray Wall for his work as Treasurer and to Loris Peggie for undertaking again the role of auditor.

Reports of all our activities as well as member articles appear in our newsletter. Thanks to Judith Cooke for her time and efforts in preparing this publication. She welcomes members' contributions.

One other person to thank is Ruth Christensen. She has been the Club librarian for quite a number of years and has done a marvellous job. This year has seen her start to hand the reins to her young assistant Bob Tucker.

So, a great past twelve months and hopefully the next twelve will not be any different.

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

Beaufort Weekend - 13-15th April 2012

Leaders: Graeme and Helen Fernandes

The campout to Beaufort and surrounds was attended by 27 members and 2 guests. The activities began with a BBQ tea beside Beaufort Lake. As darkness fell the sky was brilliantly lit up by local farmers burning off before grain sowing being commenced.

On Saturday we met 12 kms north of Beaufort and then drove along Ferntree Gully Road to Ferntree Waterfalls. From the Ferntree Gully picnic area we took the Waterfalls Nature Walk to the Ferntree waterfalls and the upper sections of the Middle Creek area. It was good to see water cascading over the falls after such a long dry period. Also the understorey with its ferns had recovered extremely well after the devastating bush fires in the area.

After morning tea, we drove via Saddle Road through some dry country forest. This road takes you from areas of wet gullies and lush vegetation, where Yarra Gums and Manna Gums grow.

Whilst on the higher and dryer peaks eucalypts such as Red Stringybark and Narrow-leaf Peppermints can be found. We drove out of the park via Bayindeen and returned back into Mt Cole State Forest through Warrak. Just past Mt Cole township a stop provided us with a good sighting of an Owlet nightjar sitting on a dry branch in broad daylight.

Further along Mt Cole Road we stopped to observe some of the geology in the area. The rocks of the park are mainly Devonian granite, intruded into overlying Ordovician sedimentary rocks some 350 million years ago.

We travelled further along Mt Cole Road to our lunch spot at Victoria Mill Scenic Reserve. This was a lovely quiet area beside Shepherds Creek and protected from the cold wind.

After lunch we headed up Ben Nevis Road to the Ben Nevis Lookout. Although cold and windy it has magnificent views of the plains and the Grampians. Here we were able to observe five Wedge tailed eagles enjoying themselves with some hang gliders soaring up and down on the wind currents.

Ben Nevis is an excellent example of Devonian granite outcrops. Because of its height Snow Gums and Shiny Teatree (*Leptospermum turbinatum*) can be found growing amongst the granite. *Leptospermum turbinatum* is the largest flowered Victorian Leptospermum.

From here we returned to Beaufort via Ararat and the Green Lake. The day finished with an enjoyable dinner and a chat at the local pub.

Beaufort Weekend - 13-15th April 2012 (cont)

Sunday we headed south to Lake Goldsmith. Although the water had receded quite considerably there were still a large number of water birds to be seen. At the first stop a few members spent some time photographing a large variety of Dragon and Damselflies amongst the long grass. One of the unusual sightings here was a Black Kite over the farmland.

From here we travelled back through Beaufort and on to Raglan on the Elmhurst Beaufort Road, which led us to the source of the Wimmera River. Here a Yellow Tufted Honeyeater was sighted.

After a short walk along the banks of the Wimmera River we travelled to the Glut. The Glut was an old sawmilling area run by the Kosminki's and Emery families. After two short walks, one which led us through some magnificent Red Stringybark forest and the other along Fiery Creek where many species of ferns were observed, the day finished with lunch with some Flame robins making an appearance.

Goodbyes were said and members dispersed, making their own way home to Melbourne, with some members stopping at Lake Burrumbeet on the way. We had an enjoyable weekend to an area where many members had not visited before. Approximately 80 birds were spotted overall.

Westernport Bay Trip 27th May 2012 Leaders: Alison and Peter Rogers

Our May excursion was held slightly later in the month so the tides were more favourable for our trip out on to Westernport Bay. A group of 34, made up of members, friends and three Peninsula Field Naturalist members set off for the morning. Leaving the Tooradin pier, we travelled on our boat into the Marine Park area of Westernport Bay. This cruise was organised to show the wonders of the Marine Park and surrounds.

On board we were lucky enough to have a Vic Parks ranger, Chris Haywood, who was eager to impart his knowledge of the area. After an introductory talk on the bay and surrounds Chris was able to point out the physical features of the bay and the interesting mangrove areas and mud flats. In addition to Chris, another boat passenger was a local resident fisherman who kept us entertained with stories of the local area.

For those interested in marine life and sea vegetation there were plenty of samples to look at, including algae, sea grasses, shells and a small fish. Other members had eyes to the sky and the sand spits, watching for the various sea birds in the area. Over 20 bird species were seen on the trip. One of the best sightings for the day was a flock of around 100 Pacific Gulls. The weather stayed fine for us, so a good trip was had by all.

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS (CONT)

Breakfast With the Birds – Badger Creek Weir 16th June 2012

Leaders: Peter & Alison Rogers with Steve & Judi Duke

The early morning weather was clear crisp and fine. 16 members and 1 visitor arrived to enjoy breakfast. Peter & Alison collected the key to open the gate, and soon had the BBQ warming up. As dawn arrived so did the members and soon the eggs and bacon were sizzling. The resident Kookaburra soon joined us under the rotunda as we all enjoyed our breaky. There were King Parrots and Crimson Rosellas gathering in the trees.

After breakfast we headed along the track in search of the elusive lyrebirds. They were in full choir sharing with us their sounds but not their selves. We ventured along the track to the weir where there were birds to be heard but not many showing their feathers.

Fungi were plentiful, colourful and varied, making for the preferred photography model for the morning. The weather stayed fine as we wandered back along the Lyrebird track in search of views of its namesake. There was a lot of evidence of the recent storms in which trees had fallen and stripped pockets of vegetation where wind had whipped through.

After morning tea we headed up the Coriander and Stringybark Tracks searching for the Lyrebirds. Eventually catching the slightest glimpse amongst the racket of its calls. We then continued along to the slip track. It was along here we had great sightings of both the Lewin's Honeyeater and Large-billed Scrubwren. Later those who had lasted all morning sat in the winter sunshine and enjoyed lunch.

Field Trip to Churchill NP and Police Paddocks 15th July 2012

Leaders: Lynn and Neal Smith

We gathered outside the front gate of Churchill National Park at 24 hour car park on a cold and windy morning with a good attendance of 28 members. We walked from entrance to Channel track and along channel towards the picnic area. Track fairly muddy and heard call of frogs, saw 2 Pacific Black Ducks swimming in the channel, female Golden Whistler, Brown Thornbills, Red Wattle Birds and Kookaburra seen along track. We climbed up along Bellbird Track with rest stop at Ridge Track. Another climb along North Boundary Track to SE lookout with views on Melbourne skyline and suburbs. Kangaroos, maidenhair fern, and fungi seen.

Field Trip to Churchill NP and Police Paddocks (cont)

Under powerlines and downhill to Army track and sheltered from cold wind. Nodding Greenhoods (*Pterostylis nutans*) and white heath in flower along the bank. We returned to picnic area and walked back along the road to our cars.

Lunch at picnic tables in the sun (cold wind still) entertained by photo shoot involving old car and scantily clad young lady.

We walked around the nature loop which was overflowing with water on the track and then moved on to Police Paddocks.

Walked to the viewing lookout along Frankston Drive and saw lots of kangaroos below us on the lower swampy ground.

Took loop walk back and found Imperial White butterflies (*Delias harpalyce*) just emerging from pupa and sunning themselves. Shiny black pupa cases in the web made by caterpillars hanging in Mistletoe with emerging black, white, yellow and red butterflies clinging to the web, it was a great sight. The underside of the butterfly's wings is the colourful part with white and black upper side. In a sheltered area we found White-eared and Yellow faced Honeyeaters together in same tree.

Total of 22 bird species seen

FIELD CARE DAY

Field Care Day, Osborne Peninsula, 29th July 2012

Leaders: Alan and Hazel Veevers

The annual field care day was attended by 12 enthusiastic members armed with assorted tools from their own collections, only to be politely informed that none would be needed as the appropriate tools for the job in hand were being provided by the hosts. The activity was, once again, with the Osborne Peninsula Landcare Group, ably led by Ann Penrose. The expected rain held off and a total of 1500 tubes of grasses and shrubs were planted at 3 sites near to the river bank. It was gratifying to see that our 2011 plantings had, on the whole, survived and become established plants. We left well satisfied with our efforts and confident that the outcome would be as good as last year.

Field Trip to Yea Wetlands & Cheviot Tunnel – 11th August 2012

by Leader: Jack Airey

After a week of wet weather a passing local advised that the river had risen on Friday night. The entrance road had a mini-stream running across it but after some umming and arring we headed in, to be stopped in our tracks when we realised the extent of the flooding. It was only a short visit but even from the car park the birdlife was quite active and we counted 16 species.

On Limestone Road we passed through a cutting. Listed as a National Heritage site, it contains fossils of the genus *Baragwanathia*. Discovered in 1875 but only fully identified in 1935 by Dr. Isobel Cookson, these fossils are dated in the late Silurian period (420 million years ago). *Baragwanathia* is the oldest leafy foliage plant so far found on Earth.

Turning onto Cheviot Road some lucky members were treated to brief views of a White-necked Heron in a flooded paddock beside the road.

We arrived at the Cheviot rail tunnel and, after an introductory talk from our leader, members proceeded through the tunnel. Emerging into the light at the far end we were greeted by the calls of Yellow Thornbills and a Scarlet Robin, both providing good views.

The majority of members chose to come back to the car park via the "overland" route and were rewarded with sightings of 2 Australasian Grebes and a Ringtail Possum. Everyone returned to the car park for lunch.

After lunch members were free to carry out their own wanderings with the end of the formal excursion.

White-necked Heron on Cheviot Road – photo Jack Airey

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS (CONT)

Field Trip to Coolart – 9th September 2012

Leaders: Warwick and Eleanor Dilley

Sixteen members and two visitors met at Coolart on a cloudy morning, which subsequently cleared to a beautiful, sunny afternoon. A Tawny Frogmouth was quickly spotted in one of the trees in the car park, which was a promising start.

We spent the morning covering most of the woodland walks (one section was too wet to be attempted), enjoying the birds and spring-flowering plants. A Ringtail Possum was spotted in its dray but declined to show us more than some fur. Further on, a Koala was much easier to see, and we all examined with interest a recently dead female Agile Antechinus. A number of Imperial White Butterflies were also to be seen on the wing in various places.

After lunch on the lawn, we went round the wetlands, making good use of the hides. The Luxton Lagoon was busy with nesting Ibis, both Australian White and Straw-necked, various ducks, a Pied Cormorant and as we arrived there, a patrolling Swamp Harrier.

We finished the afternoon with a cautious viewing (two at a time) of a Boobook Owl roosting in the Stables.

The Bird List for this Field Trip will be included in the next issue of the Newsletter.

NATURE NOTES

Bird List – Beaufort Weekend - 13-15th April 2012

F-Forest G-Lake Goldsmith B-Lake Burrumbeet

	F	G	B		F	G	B
Australasian Grebe	x			Little Pied Cormorant	x		
Australian Hobby	x			Little Raven	x		
Australian Pelican			x	Long Billed Corella	x		
Australian Shelduck	x	x		Lorikeet Rainbow	x		
Australian Wood Duck	x			Magpie	x	x	
Black Faced Cuckoo Shrike	x			Magpie Lark	x	x	
Black Fronted Dotterel			x	Masked Lapwing	x	x	
Black Shouldered Kite	x	x	x	Nankeen Kestrel	x	x	
Black Swan	x	x		Owlet Nightjar	x		
Brown Falcon	x	x		Pacific Black Duck	x	x	
Chestnut Teal	x			Purple Swamphen	x		

cont

NATURE NOTES (CONT)

Bird List – Beaufort Weekend - 13-15th April 2012 (cont)

F-Forest G-Lake Goldsmith B-Lake Burrumbeet

	F	G	B		F	G	B
Crested Pigeon	x			Raven Australian		x	
Crimson Rosella	x			Red Rumped Parrot		x	
Dusky Moorhen	x			Robin Scarlet	x		
Eastern Spinebill	x			Robin-Eastern Yellow	x		
Eastern Strike Tit	x			Robin-Flame	x		
Egret Great	x			Silver Gull	x	x	
Eurasian Coot	x	x		Silvereye	x		
Eurasian Sky Lark		x		Spoonbill Yellow Billed	x	x	
Falcon Peregrine	x			Spotted Harrier			x
Finch- Gold		x		Spotted Pardalote	x		
Finch-Red Browed	x			Sulphur Crested Cockatoo	x		
Forktailed Brown Kite		x		Superb Blue Wrens	x		
Galah	x			Swamp Harrier	x		
Golden Whistler	x			Thornbill Brown	x		
Goldenheaded Cisticola		x		Thornbill Striated	x		
Grey Fantail	x			Thornbill Yellow Rumped	x		
Grey Shrike Thrush	x	x		Tree Martin	x		
Grey Teal	x			Wattlebird Red	x		
Honeyeater Brown Headed	x			Wedge Tailed Eagle	x		
Honeyeater White Eared	x			Welcome Swallow	x	x	
Honeyeater White Faced	x			Whistling Kite			x
Honeyeater Yellow Tufted	x			White Faced Heron	x	x	
Honeyeater-New Holland	x			White Fronted Chat		x	
Honeyeater-White Naped	x			White Necked Heron		x	
Honeyeater-White Plumed	x	x		White Throated Treecreeper	x		
Kookaburra	x			White Winged Choughs	x		
Little Black Cormorant	x			Willy Wagtail	x	x	
							76 species

Bird List – Westernport Bay Trip 27th May 2012 on the Bay and in the Carpark

Crested pigeon	Pacific gull	Silver gull
Welcome swallow	White faced heron	Pelican
Sacred ibis	Little pied cormorant	Australasian grebe
Crested tern	Black swan	Pied oyster catcher
White bellied sea eagle	Hoary headed grebe	Double banded plover
Great egret	Australian darter	Sooty oyster catcher
Little black cormorant	Red wattle bird	Magpie
Little raven	Royal spoonbill	
		24 species

Bird List - Badger Creek Weir 16th June 2012

Wedge-tailed Eagle	Common Bronzewing	Sulphur-Crested Cockatoo
Crimson Rosella	Australian King-Parrot	Superb Lyrebird
White-Throated Treecreeper	Superb Fairy-wren	Eastern Spinebill
Lewin's Honeyeater	White-browed Scrubwren	Large-billed Scrubwren
Brown Thornbill	Pied Currawong	Eastern Yellow Robin
Welcome Swallow		16 species

Birdlist - Yea Wetlands & Cheviot Tunnel 11th August 2012

Australian Wood Duck	Dusky Moorhen	Yellow-rumped Thornbill
Pacific Black Duck	Galah	Yellow Thornbill
Grey Teal	Long-billed Corella	Australian Magpie
Chestnut Teal	Little Corella	Willie Wagtail
Australasian Grebe	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Magpie-lark
Australian Pelican	Superb Fairy-wren	Australian Raven
Australian White Ibis	White-plumed Honeyeater	Little Raven
White-necked heron	Bell Miner	Scarlet Robin
Great Egret	Noisy Miner	Flame Robin
Whistling Kite	Red Wattlebird	Welcome Swallow
Wedge-tailed Eagle	White-naped Honeyeater	Tree Martin
Purple Swamphen	Brown Thornbill	35 species

MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The Dance of the Crane Flies by Cecily Falkingham

Order: *Diptera*

Family: *Tipulidae*

Photo by Eleanor Dilley

One of the more unusual sightings of the Ringwood Field Naturalists' campout recently was a plethora of Crane Flies, (not to be confused with Scorpion Flies which have four wings) Crane Flies can have aquatic or terrestrial larvae, depending on species. Some species spend part of their life cycle in water and are food for fish and turtles.

The excitement started when some of our members noted what at first glance looked like a mass of large mosquitoes clustered against the toilet wall, the fluttering mass of insects seemed to be dancing, rising and falling in a frenzy of activity. This is normal behaviour as swarms of male Crane Flies dance above the tree tops looking for females.

Australia has 850 described species of Crane Flies with wingspans ranging from 6mm to 75mm. Their flight is quite slow and they are easily caught. Their two wings are often beautifully veined and on close examination of our specimen, the wings had a delicate pink sheen. Their legs are long and extremely fragile.

They are plant feeders and do not sting humans. Adult Crane Flies are food for bats and birds and are often attracted to very bright lights.

The female inserts her ovipositor to inject eggs into the soil surface, if she lays eggs in water she places her abdomen under the water surface to lay her eggs. The larvae spend much of the life cycle under leaf litter or if aquatic at the bottom of the stream or river.

The large swarm we saw would provide birds and bats with a valuable protein food source and in doing so they are an important part of the ecosystem.

So next time you see what looks a little like a mosquito, have a good look before swatting it, it may be a harmless Crane Fly.

Feral Cats by Loris Peggie

In July I brought information about Feral Cats published by Arid Recovery at Roxby Downs, indicating just how many small native animals one feral cat can devour in one day's hunting.

I know many people are very fond of their cats but must realize that their cats, given the opportunity, will hunt. I do not own a cat but neighbouring cats kill at least one bird a week on my front or back lawn and I would suspect their owners do not think their cat would do this. Even keeping cats locked up from 8:00 pm to 6:00 am does not solve the problem, as most cats would hunt during the day.

Arid Recovery operates permanent traps and undertakes spotlighting around the boundary fence to ease the pressure that feral animals place on the fence. In the 15 years and their efforts to reduce feral cat numbers, 1455 cats have been captured and euthanized and their stomach contents analysed to determine just what they have been eating. The estimate is that each feral had on average two small animals in its stomach—the contents of their stomach representing just one night of hunting! If each of the estimated 15 million feral cats ate just two small animals each night, that is 30 million small animals (many of these native) that are being lost every day!

May was declared Feral Cat month to educate the community. In Roxby Downs your cat must be registered (same as for a dog), de-sexed, micro-chipped and kept inside or in a properly constructed cat run and walked on a leash—never roam free.

Are you a responsible cat owner?????

Source: Arid Recovery – Newsletter – Winter 2012

Search – *www.aridrecovery.org.au*

Dates for your Diary

16-18th November – Club Spring Weekend to Yarram

15-17th March 2013 - SEANA Weekend – Peninsula FNC Merricks Lodge *www.home.vicnet.net.au/~penfnc*

Ringwood Field Naturalists Club Inc. Reg.No. A 9601 ABN 29099297169

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